

Emma Stern Champagne Problems

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DIRIMART DOLAPDERE



Replika, 2026 (digital version)

Dirimart is pleased to present *Champagne Problems*, Emma Stern's inaugural solo exhibition with the gallery her debut presentation in Istanbul.

The exhibition is a continuation of Stern's ongoing body of work, which merges traditional painting processes with an interest in avatars and virtual world-building. Utilising commercially available 3D software intended for game developers to create virtual subjects and environments as a point of departure, Stern generates and designs her compositions before rendering them through a classical oil-on-canvas technique. The result is a distinctive genre of contemporary figuration enabled by digital media, allowing for an in-depth examination of the virtual female.

This contemporary subject matter may, at first, appear at odds with Stern's preferred 'noble medium' of oil-on-canvas painting, as well as the traditional techniques and formal compositional templates borrowed from art history. In fact, the artist posits that this contrast is an opportunity for a rereading: virtual female subjects are recognisable as archetypes because culture has long honed them in representations of women – first in Western art history as nudes and muses, then in pornography and video games, and now, in the age of artificial intelligence, where algorithms are trained on these histories, designed to satisfy preferences and driven by the same desires that reproduce these tropes. Stern's focus is on how these preferences and desires are imposed specifically on virtual female bodies, exacerbating the tension between empowerment, objectification, and, finally, self-objectification. As our avatars become ever-more inextricable from our physical selves, Stern approaches avatar creation as a contemporary mode of self-portraiture, invoking the implications for the future of personhood, femininity, and self-determination.

Champagne Problems, which takes its name from a tongue-in-cheek reference to the phrase commonly used to describe trivial, 'first-world' issues stemming from a privileged life, was heavily informed by the artist's 2024 trip to Istanbul. During this visit, she was exposed for the first time to the city's vibrant culinary and hospitality culture. With those experiences in mind, the works in the exhibition conjure scenes from an imaginary and fantastically lavish dinner party, perhaps on the eve of some arbitrary New Year. Among those guests in attendance are recurrent figures from Stern's extended universe – some of whom have appeared before in her previous works, such as Skott the skeleton and Buttercup the centaur – as well as several new characters making their debut.

The exhibition's centrepiece shares its title with the show: *Champagne Problems*, a three-metre painting that reimagines Leonardo's *The Last Supper* through Stern's signature visual vocabulary. Here, she replaces the familiar archetypes of historical figures with voluptuous female avatars – slick, glossy, and rendered in cyber hues – depicted in various states of debauchery and undress. This clear reference to the art historical canon



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is characteristic of Stern's practice, once again combining traditional painterly tools with contemporary technologies, intertwining the classical and the hyper-contemporary.

Among the new characters conceived specifically for the works in this exhibition is *Replika*, a curvy humanoid cyborg designed in collaboration with 3D artist and designer Kaan Ülgener. Appearing in three paintings across the exhibition and realised as a life-size stainless-steel sculpture, *Replika* emerges as the central figure within the exhibition's narrative that unfolds when the images are read as a whole. In particular, the painting *Replika (Server)* (2025) offers a clue in its double-entendre title, invoking her role as a humble servant in contrast with her advanced cyborg capabilities. The sculpture, simply titled *Replika*, further emphasises this dissonance: a domestic machine imbued with a complex, opaque, and very possibly sinister inner world.

Champagne Problems is on view at Dirimart Dolapdere from 5 February to 1 March 2026.

Emma Stern (b. 1992, New York) received her B.F.A. from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn in 2014. Stern's selected solo exhibitions include *Champagne Problems*, Dirimart Dolapdere, Istanbul (2026); *Hell Is Hot*, Almine Rech, Paris (2025); *Everything Looks Like a Nail (To a Hammer)*, Pond Society, Shanghai (2024); *Penny & The Dimes: Dimes 4Ever World Tour*, Almine Rech, London (2023); *Booty!*, Half Gallery, New York (2022); *Desert Pearl*, Marfa Invitational, Texas (2022) and *Home Bodies*, Carl Kostyál, Stockholm (2021). Among her group exhibitions are *Effets indésirables*, New Galerie, Paris (2025); *Utopia Vol. I*, Palm Gallery, Taipei (2025); *She Said She Said: Contemporary Artists from Rubell Museum*, Arlington Museum of Art, Texas (2024); *J'ai pleuré devant la fin d'un manga*, Galerie Édouard-Manet, Paris (2024); *Real Fake Door*, Arsenal Contemporary, New York (2023); *Cautere*, FRAC Corsica, Corsica (2022) and *Resting Point of Accommodation*, Almine Rech, Brussels (2021). The artist's works are included in the collections such as The Rubell Museum Collection, Miami; Pond Society, Shanghai and Gullringsbo Konstsamling, Stockholm. Emma Stern lives and works in New York and Paris.

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